Mexico's 'Imported' Woes Survive the Big Party

By Gladys Delmas
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MEXICO CITY—The party is over and there is a feeling of the morning after here. But everyone agrees the Olympic Games provided a good party—and worth whatever it cost.

Newspapers here have been searching the world press for comment, even the rare carping ones—a further sign of richer chords, first heard during the student crisis, in the normally adulatory chorus.

There is a good deal of self-congratulation, too, mingled with disarming surprise—"We didn't believe we could do so well!" — as well as a serious assessment of what lasting effects the games may have.

The financial balance sheet is difficult to draw. It is estimated that Mexico spent in the neighborhood of $160 million, most of it in local currency. (Since this was disbursed largely in the capital, however, there is some resentment in the provinces for not having shared in the bonanza.) In return, Mexico received something over $80 million, mostly in foreign currency, from the sale of tickets, radio and television rights, food and lodging for the delegations, various concessions, the sale of commemorative stamps that will never be sent and coins that will never be spent, and from Olympic tourists — who spent on the average twice as much as the normal variety.

Of course, the fixtures — including the sports palace, swimming pool, freeways and Olympic villages—will remain. The modern communications facilities, largely paid for by foreign concessions during the games, are of permanent importance to the whole country. After a cleanup, the villages will be sold as apartments to middle-income people.

Mexico thus did not go for broke to produce "the greatest show on earth," although to do so would have been in the nature of things here, where a family chosen as patron of the annual fiesta of the village saint customarily kills not only the fattest calf but the fresh cow as well.

The invisible benefits are harder to evaluate. The free worldwide publicity is invaluable for a country whose secret weapon in the struggle for development has been tourist income. Now the "industry without chimneys" is tooling up for a greater influx than ever before and hopes are high that it will come increasingly from Europe, South America and Japan instead of almost exclusively from the United States and Canada as in the past.

Not only a wider variety of tourists is expected but also a broader base for Mexico's sources of credit. A recent loan from the Arabian oil states is cited as an example.

Put on the Map

THE MOST lasting effects, however, may prove to be psychological. Mexico has long been withdrawn, licking the wounds from one or another of the great upheavals that has marked its history, cultivating its "Mexicanness." Only within the last decade has it begun to look outward, under the impulse of its last president, Adolfo Lopez Mateos, who unexpectedly joined the Latin American Free Trade Area, journeyed to the Far East and Europe as well as the United States looking for markets and credit, and finally won for his country, to almost everyone's surprise and dismay, these Olympic Games.

This put Mexico squarely on the map, along with its mythological defects: the altitude, the intestinal disorder sometimes known as "Montezuma's Revenge" and Mexican indolence and inefficiency.

These the games have helped to erase. Athletes did not die like flies in the thin air; on the contrary, many world records were broken. Given proper precautions, intestinal disorders proved to be no worse than those afflicting tourists elsewhere. (The worst case was that of a Russian so enchanted by a fragrant and unfamiliar sort of melon that he ate it rind and all.) Mexican organization of the complicated logistics, communications and accommodations involved in so massive a gathering proved to be as good, if not better, than anyone else's.

The Role of Host

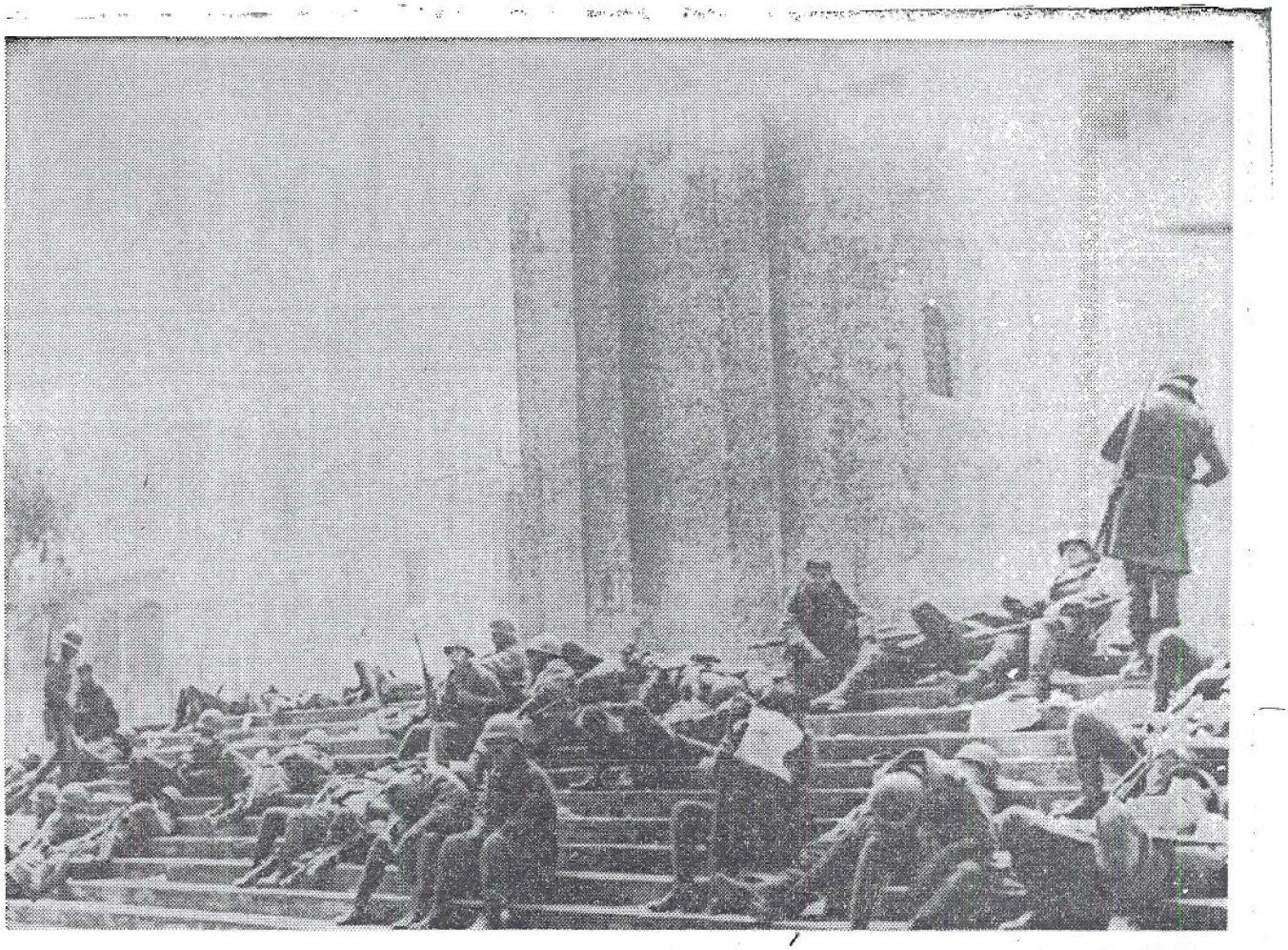
FURTHERMORE, Mexico's goal, as hoped, was different from that of its predecessors. The emphasis was quite simply to be a good host, to show the country's natural friendliness for all people, its gaiety and courtesy.

That it did, for the first time in history, take nine medals—three gold, three silver and three bronze—was a pleasant surprise, like a favor at a party, but not considered in any way as the reason for the party. The contrast is sharp between this attitude and that of France at the winter Olympics in Grenoble, where President de Gaulle decorated gold medalists with the Legion of Honor on the field of battle, and several foreign delegations threatened to withdraw in a huff because they felt their hosts were loading the dice in their own favor.

But "what we gave the world is less important than what we gave ourselves," says a recent editorial. One of these gifts is a new self-assurance. Abel Quezado, a well-loved humorist, points out that ever since Cortez defeated Cuauhtemoc, Mexico has chosen its heroes among the losers. "Perhaps the success of the Olympics will help us get used to success," he added. Another Mexican said to me, "Now when I go abroad, people will no longer say 'Mexico? Isn't that some place in Brazil?'"

If Mexico now has a place in the world, the world has also come to Mexico not only in the 115 flags in the Olympic stadium, borne by varicolored athletes, but all the varied events of the "Cultural Olympics," from an exposition devoted to nuclear energy to the contraptions of cybernetics.

While Mexican architecture is as varied and imaginative as any in the world, the graphic arts still have a hangover from the great revolutionary muralists of the 1920s and 1930s. Official monuments cluttering the splendidly engineered new highways are



Associated Press

The student wars seem to be over for these troops relaxing in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Plaza.

often unpleasantly reminiscent of Stalin's social realism. It may be hoped that the great abstract statues by distinguished sculptors lining the "Friendship Highway" which links the Olympic sites will inspire local sculptors—and local officialdom.

Unsettled Student Revolt

THE WORLD, it is felt here, has also come to Mexico in another, and much less pleasant, way.

The student troubles that blooied Mexico City before the games and, for a moment, threatened to disrupt them, have generally been regarded by the government as part of the worldwide "war of generations." (The theory that they were part of an international conspiracy—CIA, Castro or Mao?—never held water; all the arrested conspirators proved to be Mexicans and there is no sign that they enjoyed any extraneous financial resources beyond the few pennies collected from sympathetic onlookers.) It now appears likely that classes will reopen on Monday after a strike of 118 days. The students say, in a sudden access of realism, that the strike was no longer putting pressure on anybody. There is general rejoicing that Mexican institutions have weathered another crisis.

Things will not be quite the same as before, however. Although the student movement never had any base in the working class or in the countryside, it did shake the complacency of officialdom and the government did feel obliged to respond to some of its most pertinent demands. President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, while refusing a public dialogue, appointed two emissaries whose quiet consultations with students and professors are credited with defusing the movement.

Even before the recent blowup, the President had proposed the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18.

The abrogation of hated Article 145 of the Penal Code, which permits arrests under the vague charge of "social dissolution," is being discussed in public hearings, although with doubtful success.

The reform of the curriculum is officially under way to make it more "modern"—but without student participation so far.

The thorny question of the police —universally regarded as corrupt, brutal and ineffective—is at last being tackled. The regent of the federal district, who presides over half a dozen police corps—other government departments have some, too, which adds to the confusion—recently announced that he would be glad to meet with a commission composed of students, teachers and "other respectable social sectors" to study its reorganization. He also, belatedly, proclaimed that he agreed with the students on many of their complaints about inequalities and injustices in Mexico.

'A New Ideology'

THE GOVERNMENT is thus aware that the troubles were due to something more profound than "the generation gap." The head of the official party admitted at a press luncheon that his party had neglected youth and was planning to do something about it. It may, however, be very late.

At another press breakfast, the Secretary of the Presidency was interrupted in his exposition of the accomplishment of the Mexican Revolution by a Mexican journalist who is also a teacher.

"My students," she said, "don't want to hear the words any more. They say this is past history and has nothing to do with our problems today. I tried to point out that we're still making progress, that even the poor farmers are getting a better deal under this administration than ever before. They won't listen. We've got to find a new terminology, a new ideology, Mr. Secretary."

Anyone who has listened to both sides must agree with her. The government talks statistics: annual average income, numbers of new houses and new schools—all impressive figures, but wrapped up in homilies about the Revolution of 1910. The students talk about ideas and ideals, new social structures and attitudes. Students and government are on parallel rails that never meet.

By odd coincidence, two persons on Monday suggested not their meeting but a collision. One was David Alfaro Siqueiros, painter and titular head of the Mexican Communist Party. In an emotional speech at the funeral of his friend, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, a veteran labor leader and head of the Popular Socialists, Mexico's only functioning Marxist party, he urged the formation of a new party of all the forces of the left, now that a new revolution is beginning.

On the same day, the government released the signed confession of its latest prisoner, Jose Revueltas, a dissident Communist and screen writer. It is a strange document.

Revueltas proclaimed himself the spiritual leader of the student movement and said he plans to form a party based on this folowing. If the government won't let him run for president in the 1970 elections, he said, he will follow the course of Madero—that is, start a revolution.

Neither of these ideas — from an elderly painter and an eccentric writer —is likely to get off the ground. It is not easy to form a new party in Mexico. The proposals are, nevertheless, straws in the wind. What will be really significant is their influence on official attitudes in the coming pre-electoral months.

As one student put it to me, "In the Olympics, we showed the world how far along the road to development we have come. Now we must show ourselves how mature we are politically."